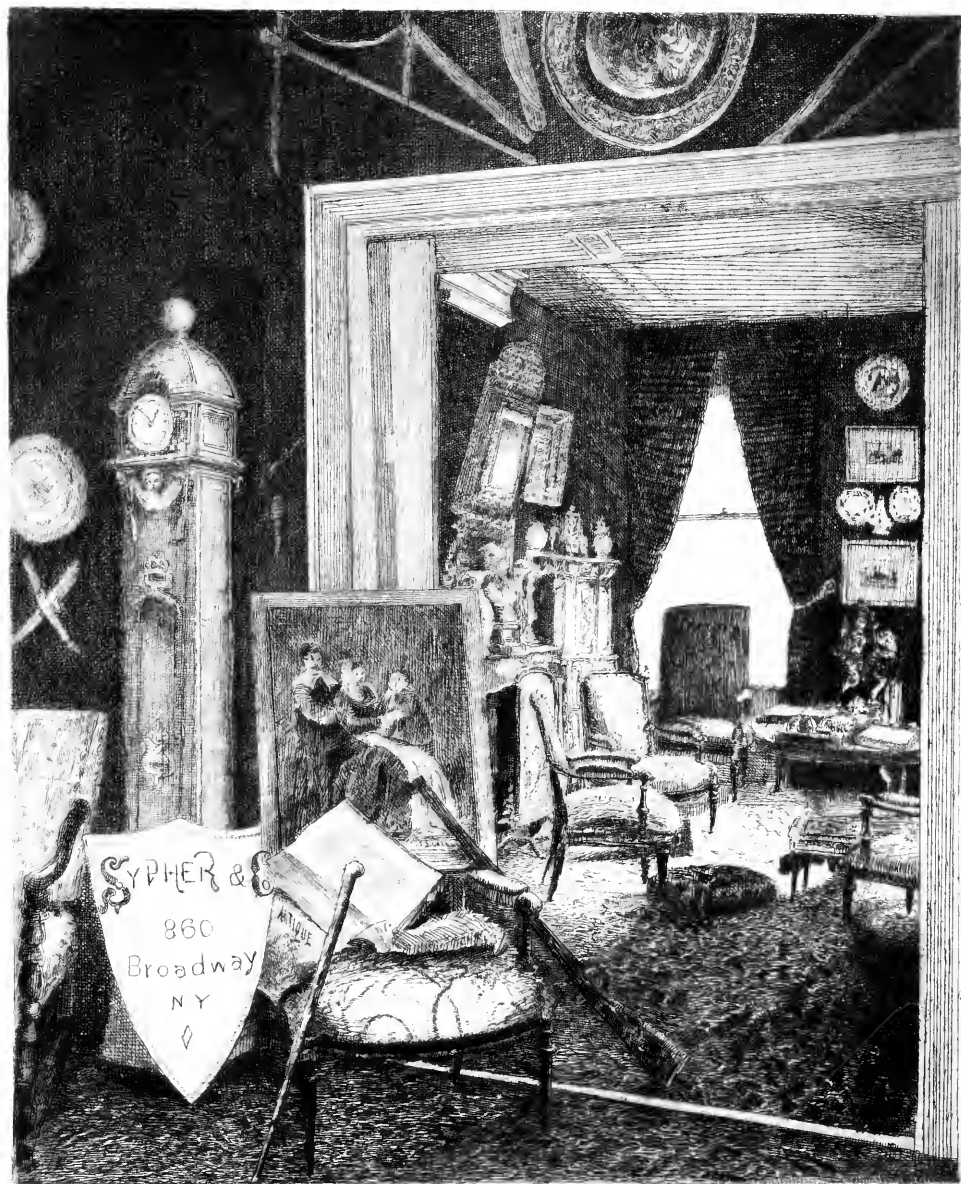

The Housekeepers' Quest

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THE
HOUSEKEEPER'S QUEST:

WHERE TO FIND PRETTY THINGS.



NEW YORK :
SYMPHER & CO.
1885.

Press of J. J. Little & Co.,
Nos. 10 to 20 Astor Place, New York.

YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY.

YOUNG married people of the present day find the task of house-furnishing a much easier one than did their grandparents, or even their fathers and mothers. Ten or a dozen years ago, the shops of the cabinet-makers and upholsterers, even in our largest cities, contained nothing really handsome; nothing that could please an artistic eye. The best that can be said for the furniture of that time is, that it was useful and well made. Yet use was too often sacrificed to the demands of a taste that we of to-day think barbarous, and which, indeed, cannot be defended.

There had been, as we all know, a good time in furniture—in old colonial days, and during the period of the Revolutionary war; and in the older parts of the country there were to be found, now and then, a few pieces, which, partly by their design, but more, perhaps, by the associations they suggested, gave an air of refinement, and a look of individual character to their usually common-place surroundings. Such were the chests of drawers, the knee-hole tables, the high-backed

chairs, the claw-foot tables and light-stands, the eight-day clocks, which are again becoming familiar sights, since the renewal of old fashions has not only brought the genuine pieces out of their obscurity, but, the demand being much greater than could be supplied by the real thing, has led to the making of copies. The Messrs. Sypher & Co. produce copies of these old pieces which are every way as handsome and well made as the originals, and, so far as interior finish is concerned, their copies are often much better than their models.

The rooms of our great grandfathers' time, were, as a rule, very slenderly furnished. They put nothing into them that was not necessary to their convenience, and as for comfort, if their rooms, as we see them reflected in the pictures and engravings of the time, look bare and uncomfortable to us, we must remember that manners as well as fashions have changed, and that our ancestors' ideas of comfort were the very opposite of ours. Even the pieces of furniture which we so much admire, the Chippendale side-boards and chairs, the cabinets, the slender-legged Pembroke tables, the tall-clocks, would seem less admirable, if we saw them standing in our ancestors' martinet rooms, each in its place doing its assigned duty, and by no means there to be looked at merely. We put them into our

CHOICE CABINETS OF EVERY DESCRIPTION, BOTH IMPORTED AND OF OUR OWN MANUFACTURE, ADAPTED TO EITHER THE LIBRARY, DINING-ROOM OR DRAWING-ROOM.



Old Venetian Sedan-Chair, fitted up as a Cabinet.

WE REPRODUCE THE BEST OLD STYLES, AND MANUFACTURE PIECES TO FIT ANY SPACE AND CONFORM TO ANY STYLE.

crowded rooms, surrounded with a multitude of things, useless, indeed, but pretty, elegant, costly, artistic, in every style, and gathered from every quarter of the globe, and in the midst of all this parade the sober mahogany with its shining brasses gives the touch of dignity that saves from the condemnation of utter frivolity.

The bareness, or as we prefer to call it, the simplicity, of our forefathers' way of living came chiefly from their poverty; they could not afford luxuries. But it came, also, in part, from the fact that they were not a much traveling people, and their curiosity about other lands and their inhabitants was not very great. In the sea-port towns we heard more about "foreign parts," and more frequently saw curious things, but seldom things of value, brought from abroad by sailors and sea-captains; not purchased nor purchasable in the shops.

We, on the contrary, take a very great interest in other peoples and in other countries, an interest so great that it has affected our whole way of living; not only our houses show it, but our pictures, our amusements, our books, our newspapers, and our dress.

In our houses we give our love of adventure free play, and like to be reminded at every turn, of the fact that America, big as is her territory, is but a small part of the world. It is not because we care little for our

INTERIOR DECORATION, IN BOTH ANTIQUE AND
MODERN STYLES, IN HARD WOODS, A SPECIALTY.
PLANS AND DRAWINGS FURNISHED, AND ESTIMATES
MADE ON DESIGNS SUBMITTED BY ARCHITECTS.



Hall Seat, in old oak, from the interior of an old Convent in Belgium.

HAVING EXTENDED OUR FACILITIES FOR MANUFACTURING, WE ARE
PREPARED TO FURNISH THE BEST QUALITY OF WORK IN ALL
BRANCHES OF DECORATION.

own country, but because we have a great desire to see how other people live, that we encourage our artists to paint foreign landscapes, foreign architecture, and foreign customs. We dislike the uniformity with which our ancestors furnished their houses; though unity would be the better word, since, just as our greater variety comes from our scattered interests, and our wider acquaintance with the world, the want of variety in our grandfathers' houses came from their home-keeping ways and the much greater interest they felt in the little world they lived in.

Thirty-odd years ago, there was practically only one place in New York, where, if you wanted anything outside the regulation list of furniture prescribed for all citizens from the well-to-do to the richest, there was any likelihood of your finding it. This was "Marley's," the original mustard-seed out of which has grown the wide-spreading tree that to-day is known all over the country as "Sypher's." New York in those days was an extremely pleasant semi-rural city with a semi-rural population, fast growing citified and too big for its clothes, and with ways of living among the rich and well-to-do, comfortable and abundant, but nothing luxurious nor pretentious. The houses were all plain in their external architecture, as may still be seen in surviving specimens in Waverly Place, Bleecker Street, St.

GRANDFATHERS' CLOCKS—OLD ENGLISH, OLD DUTCH.

MANY OF THESE HAVE CHIMES, AND GIVE THE MONTH, DAY OF THE WEEK, DAY OF THE MONTH, AND PHASES OF THE MOON. MANY ARE MECHANICAL, REPRESENTING SHIPS IN MOTION, MUSICIANS PLAYING, ETC.

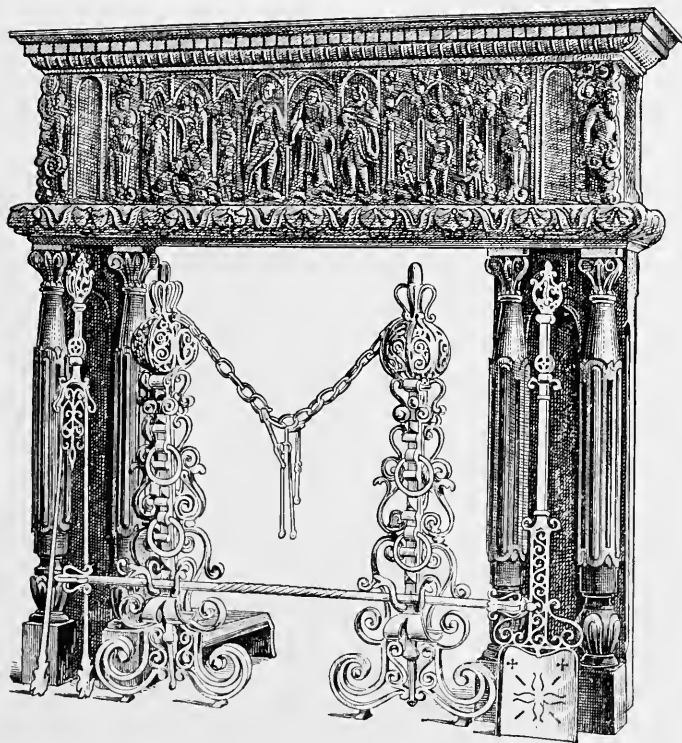


THESE CLOCKS HAVE CASES MADE OF MAHOGANY, OAK, OR FRENCH WALNUT, AND ARE EITHER CARVED, INLAID, OR IN THE SOLID WOOD. ALL ARE IN PERFECT ORDER AND ARE GUARANTEED AS TIMEPIECES.

Mark's Place, and in a few other quarters of the city once fashionable, but now deserted or neglected. Within, the outside plainness was matched by an equal plainness; big rooms, high-studded, always arranged on one plan, so that the way-faring burglar though a fool, could not err therein. The mantel-pieces were of marble, Black Egyptian, Yellow Sienna or White Carrara, this last usually appropriated to the parlor or drawing-room, and often most expensively carved in Italy. The doors on the main floor were veneered with mahogany, and mantel-pieces and doors alike contrasted most disagreeably with the almost universal white walls and white painted wood-work. The walls were often left unpainted, as the "hard finish" of the plaster was considered "elegant" by the gentle housekeeping mind, or, if painted, nothing allowed beyond one of the fashionable "tints;" "ashes of rose," "pearl-gray," or "cream-white." "So neat, you know, my dear! So chaste!"

Into these pallid, characterless barns of rooms, came the furniture of the period, heavily tramping, as with its boots on. First, the Behemoth piano, on four stout legs (we, just then, beginning to make the now, alas, too familiar square piano), an object costly then as to-day, and then as now felt to be much in the way. Next, between the windows of both rooms, tall mirrors rising

METAL-WORK IN ANDIRONS, FIRE-SETS, COAL-HODS,
WOOD-BOXES, ETC., ETC.



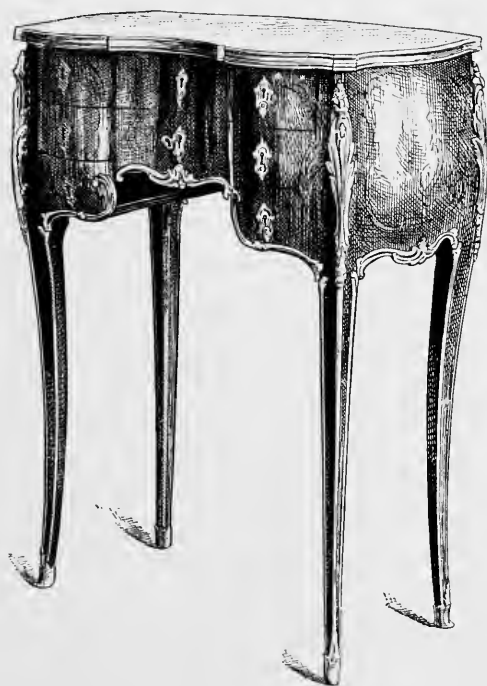
Antique Mantel-piece from a Holland Interior, with Andirons, Shovel and Tongs.

FINE WOOD-MANTELS MADE TO CORRESPOND WITH OTHER INTERIOR
DECORATIONS AND CABINET WORK.

above "pier-tables," style of the First Empire, marble-topped, with rosewood legs, columnar, slender, with bases and caps of ormulu, or in Louis XIV.'s flourishing manner, with legs grotesquely bowed and profuse in carved and gilded ornamentation. In rich people's houses, these pier-tables supported Sèvres vases, bronze candelabra, or bronze figures, reductions, generally of antiques. The curtains, too, must have a word, for they were looked upon as essential parts of the furnishing, and were made as formidable and uncomfortable as the upholsterer could invent; the material, heavy reps, or damasked satin, incapable of folds, stiffly dependent and looped up at either side, diminishing the light by one-half, and surmounted by formal lambrequins cut into shape, bordered with gimps and fringes, with heavy tassels hanging in the middle, the whole crowned by a cornice to match the style of the pier-table, and the pier-glass, chastely severe or Pompadourish, but always gilded.

Over the mantel shelf, in houses that could afford it, was a huge mirror the full width of the pier and reaching to the cornice; the mantel shelf invariably supported the chimney ornaments—no more to be dispensed with than roast-beef on Sundays—consisting of a bronze or ormulu clock in the centre with a vase or candelabrum at either end. Imagine, to complete the decora-

CHOICE SPECIMENS OF CABINET WARE, SUITABLE FOR
PRESENTATION PIECES, AND ADAPTED TO THE
DRAWING-ROOM, PARLOR OR BOUDOIR.



*French Work-Table, period of Louis XIV. Decorated after the style of Vernis
Martin.*

PIECES SIMILAR TO THE ABOVE ALWAYS ON HAND OR ORDERED
FROM OUR EUROPEAN CORRESPONDENTS.

tive part of the programme, portraits of the husband and wife occupying the wall-spaces on either side the chimney, and, to fill up the space opposite the fire, a large framed engraving of either Da Vinci's "Last Supper," Trumbull's "Signing of the Declaration," or somebody's "Daniel Webster addressing the Senate,"—and the concessions demanded by art will be seen to have been honorably complied with. If the family had traveled in Europe, the space taken up by the mirror or the engravings would, very likely, be filled by a copy of Domenichino's "Sybil," or Raphael's "Madonna of the Chair" or some other of the staple productions of the professional copyist in the Italian galleries.

Beside the piano and the pier-table, the so-called useful furniture in this apartment consisted of two sofas, two arm-chairs, six chairs, with sometimes two ottomans or tabourets, one on either side the fire-place; all these ten or twelve pieces made of the same wood, either mahogany or rosewood, designed in the same style and covered with the same material. In the centre of the room was the orthodox "centre-table," an object generally designed with legs violently curved and no less violently carved, and supporting a marble slab to match, if possible, with the marble of the mantel-piece and the pier-table.

CHOICE SPECIMENS OF POTTERY FROM THE MOST
CELEBRATED EUROPEAN MANUFACTORIES, AS WELL
AS FINE EXAMPLES OF ORIENTAL WARES.



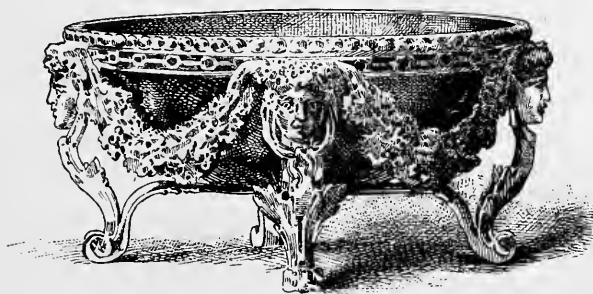
Old Vienna Plaque, from the San Donato Sale, representing the Rape of the Sabines. This, with two others, were illustrated in the large catalogue as being the finest specimens in the collection.

VASES, BEAKERS, PLAQUES, PLATES, CUPS AND SAUCERS, FIGURES,
ETC., ETC.

These were the fixed elements, thirty or forty years ago, in the furnishing of ninety-nine out of every hundred houses in New York city. Of course, where there was money these elements would be enriched according to the means or the love of display of the owner, but where the best had been done, the effect was seldom rich and never artistic, for the means and material were wanting that should bring these separate objects into harmony.

The state of things which we have lightly sketched continued until about twenty years ago, when some of the younger architects in New York—for the artists proper had no share in the matter—began to interest themselves in the decoration and furnishing of the houses they were building. The first steps in this direction were taken by Mr. Russell Sturgis, who wrote on the subject in 1865, in the Art Journal, *The New Path*, a series of papers called "Our Furniture," which were really only the text to the more important professional work that this accomplished professional gentleman and his associates, Mr. George F. Babb and Mr. Alexandre Sandier were doing in decorating the parlors of our New York houses, and in designing furniture for them. The work done by Mr. Sturgis in this direction, founded as it was in native good taste and an exhaus-

SOLID SILVERWARE—CHOICE PIECES OF OLD ENGLISH,
DATING AS FAR BACK AS QUEEN ANNE AND THE
FOUR GEORGES. ALSO CHOICE SPECIMENS OF OLD
DUTCH, GERMAN, FRENCH, RUSSIAN, AMERICAN, ETC.



Silver Salt. One of a set of four from the San Donato Sale.

WE HAVE ALWAYS IN OUR STOCK MODERN SILVERWARE, OF THE
BEST AMERICAN MAKERS, AND IT IS OFFERED AT PRICES FAR BELOW
THE ACTUAL COST OF MAKING. IN THIS DEPARTMENT GREAT BAR-
GAINS CAN BE SECURED FOR PRESENTATION PIECES, FOR WEDDINGS,
BIRTHDAYS, OR ANY OTHER OCCASION, WHERE A GIFT OF SILVER IS
DESIRABLE.

tive knowledge of what had been accomplished elsewhere, still holds its own by its refinement and originality in the midst of much that is tawdry and vulgar in our later decorative design.

The rich people who were the clients of the new men in architecture, were, of course, able to have their decorations and furniture made to order, and were not dependent on the shops. But, for the rest of us, the shops had to suffice, and very slow progress we made in getting what we wanted. The only place where there was a chance of finding picturesque material to meet our newly fledged desire for giving our houses an artistic look, was "Sypher's," the name of Marley's old place under its new management. Those who remember Marley's as they go through the present extensive establishment in its new quarters on Union Square, will see that with all its completeness and the abundance of its stores, the new place is yet only the natural growth from the original plant, and that it differs in quantity, and not in quality from the pleasant haunt where we hunted curiosities "before the war." Other shops, similar in character, have sprung up here and there in our own city, and in other places, and there has been a complete revolution in the whole domain of house-furnishing and decoration, a revolution which has thrown opportunities in the way of everybody, rich and poor

CLOCKS, CANDELABRA, VASES IN MARBLE, BRONZE
AND ORMOLU.



Clock Set, in Ormolu and Malachite, from the San Donato Sale. First Empire period, and made by and signed by Thoumire, the most celebrated artist of his time. RECENTLY SOLD.

OLD ENGLISH BRACKET-CLOCKS, OLD DUTCH BRACKET-CLOCKS, OLD
FRENCH BRACKET-CLOCKS, FIRST EMPIRE ORMOLU AND BRONZE CLOCKS,
BUHL BRACKET-CLOCKS, MODERN FRENCH CLOCK SETS, IN MARBLE
AND BRONZE.

alike, to gratify the natural and healthy desire for tasteful surroundings; so that, if we furnish our houses with ugly things, it is our own fault, since well-designed and handsome things cost in these days absolutely no more than ugly things, and there is even less danger from a small purse than from a large one.

But, in the midst of all this much-needed improvement, the seeker after pretty things, odd things, things of the old time, still finds "Sypher's" the richest and most varied quarry. The new quarters of the well-known firm are on the corner of Seventeenth street and Broadway, facing Union Square, and running back to Eighteenth street. The view over the immense main-floor is uninterrupted except by the few iron columns that support the ceiling, and the contents are arranged with so much system, and kept in such immaculate order, that a very pleasant and instructive morning may be spent in wandering about among these objects. But besides the main-floor, there is another, almost as large, below stairs, brilliantly lighted by gas, where the more valuable and beautiful things are displayed, arranged in such ways as to give a notion of how they will look when they are set up in one's own house; an assemblage of handsome things that produces a bewildering effect when one comes upon them from the streaming sunlight of the upper rooms.

CHOICE VASES FROM THE FACTORIES AT SEVRES,
BERLIN, DRESDEN, NAPLES, AND OTHER FACTORIES
NOW OUT OF EXISTENCE.



Pair of rare old French Vases, from the San Donato Sale. SOLD.

CHOICE PIECES OF CHINA FROM THE LEADING ENGLISH FACTORIES—
THE ROYAL WORCESTER, CROWN DERBY, OLD SPODE, DAVENPORT, ETC.

On entering the place from Union Square, we find at the left hand the cases and windows, containing the finer specimens of porcelain and old silver, with carved ivories, old Dutch and Venetian glass, and occasional specimens of artistic jewelry of the Renaissance time, or of French and English make of the last century. This, as being the best-lighted portion of the establishment, is given up to such objects as require a closer examination, but the store of pretty things is so large that the cases for their display could not be confined to this corner—a large room in itself—but are ranged along the whole Seventeenth street side. The porcelain is of all the choicer kinds, Oriental and European, and in the years during which we have known the establishment, we have found here fine, and often remarkable specimens of the various manufactures: Japanese and Chinese, Old Indian, Persian, with Italian Majolica, the porcelain of Dresden, and Sèvres, and English pottery, Chelsea and Wedgewood, Lowestoft and Spode, and Crown Derby — all in turn, or hand-in-hand — have passed before us, and, now and then, a lucky chance has cast a good fish into our own modest basket—for “Syphers” is not a hunting ground for rich purses alone.

Those who are in search of old silver, will always find a supply of it at “Sypher’s.” Old tankards, plain

CABINETS FOR DRAWING-ROOM, LIBRARY, DINING-
ROOM—STYLE OF LOUIS XIV., STYLE OF LOUIS XV.,
STYLE OF LOUIS XVI., STYLE OF THE EMPIRE.



French Cabinet, decorated in style of Vernis Martin.

or richly beaten, speaking of merry days when good ale was brewed and drank without offense: christening-cups, as pretty as ever, though the baby lips that kissed their rims and the baby eyes that laughed above them, are no longer fair; old spoons, Dutch or English, with bowls too big, one would think, for the children's mouths for which they were meant, spoons with apostles, and ships, and angels, and eagles on their handles, much in request in these days, and found useful on our modern tables. The list would be long of all the silver, useful things and trinkets, that are to be seen here: épergnes and salvers, candelabra—the old fashioned silver “branches” which good taste is bringing back again to our supper and dinner-tables—salt-cellars and sugar-sifters, and so forth and so on: if one will only be patient, he can find here prettier silver things for his table by far than any the regulation shops can furnish.

Here, too, we find a rich supply of those bronze or ormolu ornaments for the chimney, clocks, vases, candelabra, statuettes, which at one time, as we have said, were held a necessity of orthodox furnishing, but which, after once having passed into the limbo of forgotten things are again striving for a place in our esteem. They may still be useful in certain places, and in the best of those of the Empire period or of the earlier



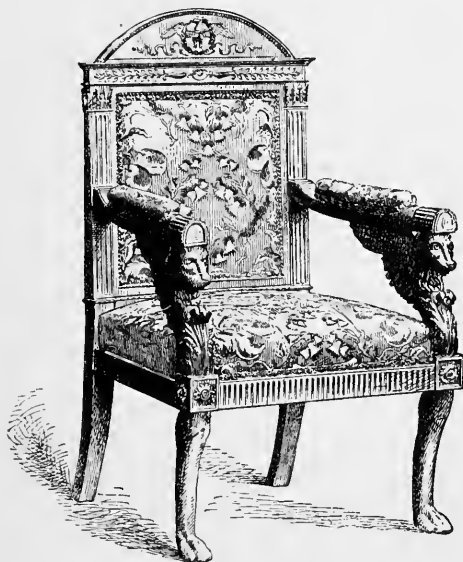
Cabinet of the period of Louis XIV., from the San Donato Sale, made of rich inlaid woods, fine ormolu mountings, with rare old Sèvres plaques and verd antique marble top. The companion to this was purchased at the same sale for a celebrated collection in Europe. RECENTLY SOLD.

Louis XIV. or Louis XV. time, we may sometimes find a dignity or a richness that cannot be considered entirely out of date. For one thing, the workmanship of these old pieces is always of the best, and they are good to last for another century.

The greater portion of the main floor, behind the showy ranks of glass-cases and tables filled with the more delicate objects, is taken up with the furniture of a more useful kind. Here are mahogany tables beneath whose hospitable roof so many legs have been stretched, and which, in their hale old age, may yet shelter many more. And side-boards, whereon to set forth the old silver, and the porcelain that have been picked up in our rounds—side-boards of oak, the solid English fellows made in a time when “solid” was a word in fashion. And here, too, are side-boards in the earlier Chippendale and Sheraton, or, as we like to call it, “Revolutionary” style, with graceful lines, and slender legs, but sturdy too, like many a silk stocking leg of the same day, that could dance a measure with a lady, or stride the break-neck hunter when nobler game than the degenerate anise-seed bag led on the hounds. These delicate, inlaid, brass-mounted side-boards are still the rage now, as they have been for some time past, and though the stock is getting low, yet such good copies are made here, and of course

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FINE CABINET WORK CONSTANTLY RECEIVED FROM
ALL THE BEST MAKERS OF EUROPE, AS WELL AS
FROM OUR OWN FACTORY.



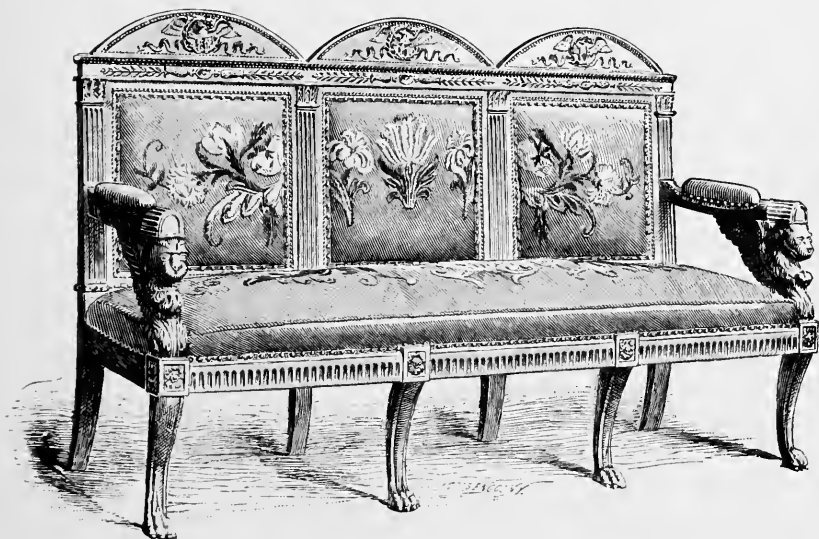
Chair, from the San Donato Sale, formerly the property of the Emperor Napoleon I., and used by him on the island of Elba. It came into the possession of Prince Demidoff, by marriage. SOLD.

REPRODUCTIONS OF THE BEST OLD ENGLISH, FRENCH, DUTCH, GERMAN AND ITALIAN PERIODS.

honestly sold for such, that we can always find a way to satisfy the sentiment.

Chairs, too, in all shapes and sizes, and plain, or rich, or splendid, as taste and the purse decree, invite us to sit down and take the matter more leisurely. Up-stairs the chairs of more solid and distinctly useful character are found; chairs that belong to the dining-tables and the side-boards, or that are sought by people who affect the more "substantial" ways of living. But, in the gala-rooms below, we find the chairs of a more ornamental character; the ornate seat of Louis XIV.'s time, in gold or white-and-gold, and too gorgeously mounted for a quiet taste, in damasked satins or flowered velvets; then, the more comfortable chairs of the next reign, low, broad-seated, with spreading arms, and flowing lines, covered with pale tapestries of nymphs and shepherds, or the fables of La Fontaine. Along with these freer designs are the more formal First Empire and Louis XVI. forms, more formal and uncomfortable to look at than they are found to be in use, and of late there has been a slight revival of interest in the furniture of these periods. Chairs, sofas, lounges, ottomans in all these styles are here in good examples; but it will be found, we think, that the later styles, those of the Empire and of Louis XVI., are too formal ("stiff" is the word) for our free-and-easy, catholic times; if they are

DRAWING-ROOM SETS IN MAHOGANY, MAHOGANY AND
 BRASS, WHITE AND GILT, OR ALL GILT, IMPORTED
 OR MADE TO ORDER. FINE FRENCH SETS COVERED
 IN BEAUVAIS OR GOBELIN TAPESTRIES, AND OTHER
 APPROPRIATE FABRICS.



*Sofa in Embroidery and Gilt, from the San Donato Sale, formerly owned by
 Napoleon I., and used by him on the island of Elba. SOLD.*

CHOICE TAPESTRIES FOR HANGINGS OF THE OLD FLEMISH AND
 FRENCH SCHOOLS. FINE SCREENS OF OUR OWN MANUFACTURE,
 PAINTED TO IMITATE TAPESTRY, AND MOUNTED IN RICH ARTISTIC
 FRAMES.

used, it will be better to have the room furnished entirely in the style to which they belong, for they will not harmonize with the comfortable things that are in favor to-day. A small reception-room may, however, be very prettily fitted up with the furniture of the time of Louis XVI., or of the Empire; the walls hung with chintz or silk, and decorated with prints in narrow gilt frames after the pictures of the time, the floor highly polished and without rugs, and the mantel ornamented with clocks, vases, candelabra, standing in front of a large mirror in a narrow frame, and with a beveled edge. With curtains of chintz at the windows, and with a bright fire upon the hearth, and the colors of the room well harmonized, even the Empire style may be made agreeable, at least for as long as we usually remain in a reception-room.

But it is not merely the objects legitimately classed as furniture that we find in this establishment; here are often pictures of exceptional merit, old copies sometimes, made before copying pictures had come to be so sordid a trade as it is to-day; sometimes a good original has been found here from the hand of a meritorious but unknown artist. Marbles, too, are often exhibited at Sypher's; indeed, we are not to be surprised at finding anything there, that, by any construction, may be supposed to belong to the furniture or decora-

tion of a house. At one time, there were a number of excellent specimens of old Dutch and Flemish cabinets and wardrobes to be seen, but they have been dispersed, and but few remain at present. Yet the spoiling of Holland and Belgium is not yet over, and lately there appeared here a great many pieces of richly carved wainscot, the lining of a room or rooms in a Belgian chateau. Italian marriage-chests, with jars and plaques of old Majolica, and at least one specimen of the school of the Della Robbias, a circular bas-relief—and the modern imitations of Ginori; Venice glass, old and new; plaques, in hammered brass of mediæval design, or modern, from Cairo or India, Persian hanging-lamps, Dutch tiles, screens of old Spanish leather, teak-wood furniture from China, with the pretty slab of landscape-marble in the backs and seats of the sofas and chairs; lacquered cabinets, and gay screens from Japan—what may one not hope to find here if once he have set his heart upon it. Nor must we forget the arms—muskets, and pistols, arquebuses and cross-bows, French, Italian, Spanish pieces, with lances, swords, spurs, and occasionally, a suit of armor, the shell from which some good knight had to be “carven out,” upon the battle-field, as Arcite was in Chaucer’s tale of old.

With such a magazine to draw from, and with the smaller ones that are not far away, it is impossible that

the old poverty of house-furnishing should ever come back. We shall no longer have rows of houses all alike inside, however the builders may condemn us to live in houses all alike outside. Now we have individual tastes shown in our furniture, and they will be shown more and more as the means of gratifying them become more common.

In such a place as "Sypher's," we are sure to find plenty of material, if not to furnish the whole house, at least to season it well with picturesque and pretty things. And, as if to make it more complete, there is now added the Book-Department, where old books may be found to suit all periods, so that we may lounge on a Louis XIV. sofa with Molière, or read our Richardson and Fielding on contemporary chairs of Sheraton or Chippendale, nestle in a *bergère* of Louis XV. with the Sentimental Journey, or with Manon, or forget the angularity of this *canapé* of Marie Antoinette's time as we live our youth over again in the pages of Paul and Virginia or the Confessions. It was a happy thought to bring these old books and this old furniture together; each lends a grace and gives reality to the other.

